

Case Study:

Exhibit 1

Class Description

Ms. Allen is a first-year ELA Teacher. Ms. Allen's 8th grade class is located in a middle school in the Marine Park section of Brooklyn. Her eighth grade class of twenty-five students consists of 15 boys and 10 girls. The class is of mixed ethnicity with 9 African-American students, 10 Caucasian students, 4 Asian students and 2 Latino students. Twelve students receive free lunch and are at poverty level and the remaining 13 are above poverty level. While 23 students achieved level 3 or higher on their standardized ELA exam, two students performed at level 2. Melissa, one of the students who performed at level 2, has improved in both reading comprehension and writing skills and is almost at standard. Adrian is a native speaker performing at a low level 2. While he is able to decode with accuracy at a fairly fluent rate, he struggles with comprehension and has trouble interpreting beyond a very literal level. Ms. Allen has recently begun a poetry unit. The students have just completed *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost.

Exhibit 2

Quiz and class discussion

Ms. Allen had given the class a short quiz on the poem consisting of four short answer questions and one extended response asking students to provide a short interpretation of the poem. Prior to the reading of the poem, Ms. Allen addressed vocabulary she thought might be challenging for students such as "diverged." Adrian answered all the literal questions correctly. He was able to articulate that the speaker had to choose between two roads. He was able to answer basic comprehension questions such as: Where did the poem take place? What was happening in the poem? Which road did the speaker choose? When asked in the extended response to explain what the writer was trying to say, Adrian responded that... "The speaker had a hard time choosing what road to travel on and ended up taking the one less traveled by. When asked how that made a difference to the speaker, he responded "All the weeds and stuff made it hard to keep going." When Ms. Allen conferred with him and asked for further explanation of his response, Adrian just shrugged and said that Frost was writing about hiking and having to decide which way to go and then mumbled that he didn't get what a big deal that was. Melissa, along with twelve other students was able to answer basic comprehension questions and identify figurative language as metaphor, however, these six students were unable to identify what was being compared and why. Eleven students were able to demonstrate understanding of both the poem's literal and figurative meanings, identify the figurative language and articulate what was being compared and why.

After having prior lessons on the components of poetry and imagery, Ms. Allen introduced the term "figurative language" during her mini-lesson. She defined it as language that is used in a way that differs from its ordinary, literal meaning. She introduced the term "metaphor" and gave an example from *Forrest Gump*. "Life is a box of chocolates." Ms. Allen put several other examples on the Smart board and

explained that a metaphor is a comparison that is implied or suggested rather than stated. She then sent the students off with copies of the poem to work in groups of four to discuss the poem and find the figurative language. After that, she gave the students a brief quiz with questions asking students to identify the figurative language in the poem and for both literal and figurative interpretation.

During the discussion face of the work period, Ms. Allen noticed that most of the students were off-task, talking about movies and sports and engaging in other off-task conversation. One group was engaged in a discussion of the poem, however, Ms. Allen overheard very disrespectful talk among the group members. “That’s stupid.” “You don’t know s—t about poetry.” “Poetry is gay anyway.” Four of the boys in the class asked why they had to read poetry “since it’s for girls.”

Exhibit 3
Lesson Plan

Topic: Poetry: Figurative Language	
Standard: 7th Grade CCS-RL4	
Lesson Objective: Students will be able to recognize figurative language in a poem and determine the poem’s meaning beyond a literal interpretation.	
Grouping: Students were grouped in mixed-ability groups of four.	
Materials: Smart Board, 26 copies of the poem <i>The Road Not Taken</i>, highlighters	
Lesson Component	Activity
Introduction	In her mini-lesson, Ms. Allen introduced the term “figurative language.” She put several examples of it on the Smart Board and provided a definition of figurative language. She then introduced the term “metaphor” and gave an example from <i>Forrest Gump</i> .
Small Group Activity	Students were grouped heterogeneously in groups of four and provided with copies of the poem <i>The Road Not Taken</i> . They were asked to discuss the poem’s title and identify figurative language in the poem and discuss the poem’s meaning.
Independent Activity	Students were given a short quiz on the poem to do individually.
Share Out	Three student volunteers offered their interpretations of the poem.

Using the Exhibits to answer the following questions:

What would be the best course of action for Ms. Allen to move Adrian beyond a literal interpretation of poetry?

- A) Provide Adrian with a list of figures of speech and their definitions. Go over each term with him while conferring with him.
- B) Provide Adrian with additional poems and practice questions.
- C) When conferring with Adrian, ask him to visualize what the imagery in the poem helps him see and ask him how it makes him feel. What might this remind him of in his own experience?
- D) After providing Adrian with a list of figures of speech, give him samples of figures of speech from different poems and ask him to practice identifying the figure of speech.
- E) During a student conference with Adrian, explain the meaning of the poem to Adrian and let him know that it is really about difficult choices we have to make in life.

Answer A is incorrect because many students can memorize literary terms, but this does not guarantee that they understand why these literary terms are used nor how they contribute to the mood and meaning of a piece of literature.

Answer B is incorrect because giving students more practice on something they don't understand without further scaffolding and instruction is like Einstein's definition of insanity- doing the same thing and expecting different results. If a student doesn't understand a concept or skill the first time, simply providing additional practice will not help him/her grasp the concept or the skill.

Answer D is incorrect because students can memorize the definition of a particular figure of speech. Students, for example, will recite by rote that a simile is a comparison using the words "like" or "as", even recognize a simile in a piece of literature, but they will not understand *why* the author used that comparison. What was he/she trying to show the reader or help the reader understand? Feel? While providing examples of figurative language is part of the scaffolding students will need, it is not sufficient to guarantee understanding beyond a literal level.

Answer E is incorrect because we then become enablers instead of empowering Adrian to interpret poems. This is how we create dependent learners who depend on the teacher for the "right" answer. While this approach might help him better understand this particular poem, it will not give him the skills needed to interpret other poems and transfer his understanding to other pieces of literature.

Answer C provides the best support for Adrian because before students need to know what something is, they need to know *why* it is. It is less important to have Adrian memorize definitions of figurative language. During conferencing, it is

important for the teacher to ask questions that will facilitate Adrian's understanding of why figurative language is used and how it is intended to convey meaning and mood. First, the teacher must help Adrian connect to the topic by helping him to activate his schema, connect to his own feelings and experiences. He needs to understand that imagery is intended to form a picture in the reader's mind so he must be directed to use his senses to envision the picture the author is painting with words. He needs to think about how that image makes him feel and why. The teacher might then ask, "When else do you feel torn in two directions? Is it always about roads? While it seems easier to do the work for Adrian, we should refrain from giving him the "correct" interpretation and instead facilitate his understanding beyond a literal interpretation by asking guiding questions and letting Adrian do the work. Through effective questioning and discussion, the teacher can model the thought processes, questions, and strategies (metacognition) that he/she uses to make meaning of literature beyond a literal interpretation. This process must be repeated over many diverse texts.

2. What could Ms. Allen have done to dispel the belief that some of the boys held that poetry is for girls?

A) Explained that many poets are male and included poems that were written by contemporary males such as Tupac Shakur, Jay-Z, Bob Dylan, etc.

B) Given an anticipation guide at the beginning of the poetry unit assessing students' attitudes and prior knowledge about poetry and engaged students in discussion about their attitudes.

C) Shown you-tube videos of spoken word poems performed by male poets

D) All of the above

The correct answer is D. Many students either lack prior knowledge about poetry or hold serious misconceptions regarding what poetry is and for whom it is intended. All of the above courses of action would activate prior knowledge and serve to address misconceptions about the role of males in poetry. It is important to pre-assess students' prior knowledge or misconceptions about a topic before engaging in a unit.

3. What is the most effective course of action that Ms. Allen should have taken to address disrespectful and insulting language that occurred in one of the groups?

A) Referred the students to the dean

B) Set and modeled clear expectations for engaging in accountable talk and cooperative work before sending students off in groups.

C) spoken privately but firmly to the members of that table group reminding them to speak respectfully and refrain from using profanity.

D) separated the students into different groups

The correct answer is B. It is important to be proactive and set up clear expectations for cooperative work and appropriate actions and speech before misbehavior occurs. This is part of creating a safe classroom environment that supports learning. While choice C is important to reinforce the rules, the

misbehavior could have been prevented in the first place. Students need to learn to get along with one another. Immediately separating students prevents them from learning to work together. This should only be a last resort. Sending students to the dean weakens your authority and prevents students from completing their work. Removing students to the dean's office should be used sparingly and only for serious or dangerous instances of misbehavior.

4. How could Ms. Allen have minimized off-task behavior?

- A) Circulated the room checking in on each table group.
- B) Asked for the group to complete some tangible task that would be collected and assessed.
- C) Designed a task so that there would be individual accountability.
- D) All of the above

The correct answer is D. It is important to walk actively circulate the room so that students are aware that you are watching their behavior and interactions. Proximity raises accountability. Having a tangible product of learning also raises accountability, as it must be completed within the time frame allotted for it. Where possible, when having students work in cooperative groups, design a task so that each student must contribute an individual part to the task that can be individually assessed or graded. Giving students individual roles also contributes to student accountability.

5. . After analyzing the information provided, write a response of approximately 150-200 words in which you identify one issue that many members of the class are facing in trying to interpret poetry beyond a literal interpretation and recognizing how the figurative language contributes to the meaning of a poem. Choose one instructional strategy you would use to address that issue you identified and explain how that strategy you identified would be effective in improving those students' instructional outcomes.